

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

The President's Weekly Address

August 30, 2014

Hi, everybody. Whether you're firing up the grill, fired up for some college football, or filling up the car for one last summer road trip, happy Labor Day weekend.

We set aside Labor Day to honor the working men and women of America. And this Labor Day, we've got more to celebrate. Over the past 53 months, our businesses have added nearly 10 million new jobs. Last month, for the first time since 1997, we created more than 200,000 jobs for 6 straight months. And for the first time in over a decade, business leaders worldwide have declared, 2 years running, that the number-one place to invest isn't China, it's America.

So there are reasons to be optimistic about where we're headed. And the decisions we make now will determine whether or not we accelerate this progress: whether economic gains flow to a few at the top or whether a growing economy fuels rising incomes and a thriving middle class.

Think about it this Labor Day. The things we often take for granted—like Social Security and Medicare, workplace safety laws and the right to organize for better pay and benefits, even weekends—we didn't always have these things. Workers and the unions who get their back had to fight for them. And those fights built a stronger middle class.

To build a stronger middle class in today's changing economy, we've got to keep fighting. We've got to fight for the right to affordable health insurance for everybody; the right to fair pay, family leave, and workplace flexibility; the right to a fair living wage.

And let me focus on that last one for a minute. In America, no one who works full time should ever have to raise a family in poverty. A hard day's work deserves a fair day's pay. And raising the minimum wage would be one of the best ways to give a boost to working families. It would help around 28 million Americans from all walks of life pay the bills, provide for their kids, and spend that money at local businesses. And that grows the economy for everybody.

The bottom line is, America deserves a raise. But until we've got a Congress that cares about raising working folks' wages, it's up to the rest of us to make it happen. And in the year and a half since I first asked Congress to raise the minimum wage, Americans of all walks of life are doing just that.

Thirteen States and DC have done their part by raising their minimum wages. Four more States have minimum wage initiatives on the ballot of this November. And the States where the minimum wage has gone up this year have experienced higher job growth than the States that haven't.

Business leaders at companies like the Gap are doing their part. They're raising base wages for tens of thousands of workers because they know it's good for business.

Mayors across the country are doing their part. Mayor Emanuel in Chicago and Mayor Garcetti in L.A. are working to lift their cities' wages over time to at least \$13 an hour.

I've tried to do my part by requiring companies that get contracts with the Federal Government to pay their workers a fair wage of \$10.10 an hour.

And earlier this month, the president of Kentucky State University set a great example by giving himself a \$90,000 pay cut so that he could give raises to his lowest paid employees. His sacrifice will give more of his workers and their families a little extra money to help make ends meet.

That's how America built the greatest middle class the world has ever known: not by making sure a fortunate few at the top are doing well, but by making sure that everyone who's willing to work hard and play by the rules can get ahead. That's the bedrock this country is built on: hard work, responsibility, sacrifice, and looking out for one another as one united American family.

So let's keep that in mind this Labor Day and every day. Have a great weekend, everybody.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 11:15 a.m. on August 29 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on August 30. In the address, the President referred to Raymond M. Burse, interim president, Kentucky State University. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 29, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 30.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Weekly addresses.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Burse, Raymond M.; Emanuel, Rahm I.; Garcetti, Eric M.

Subjects: Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Holidays and special observances : Labor Day; Labor issues : Minimum wage; Labor issues : Unions :: Labor movement and organized labor.

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